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ABSTRACT

The basic classroom reading program and the English as a Second Language Program (ESL) in the elementary school are related, yet a gap exists between them. It is suggested that the gap can be bridged in several ways: by bilingual education, through an individualized language experience approach, and by a process called "Bridge English." Bridge English would require the ESL profession to collaborate with the classroom teacher and the regular basic reading program through reordering what is taught in ESL classes to meet the specific needs of a specific reader. The language of the target text in basic reading is analyzed and oral language lessons based on this text are developed in order to make this language meaningful to the child. Several examples are given of the lexical and syntactic analysis of a basic reader and corresponding ESL activities are suggested. Two accounts of personal experiences using the approach are given. (AMH)

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Bridging the Gap Between the ESL Curriculum and the Reading Curriculum in the Elementary School*

by Margaret Moustafa

It is generally agreed that children learn the oral form of a language before they learn the written symbols for that language. Hence, the success of the reading instruction with limited and non-English speaking students in the elementary schools is effected by the ESL instruction.

Despite this, there is a general gap between the traditional ESL curriculum and the reading curriculum for elementary school children. Basal readers usually teach the word can right away. ESL programs traditionally deal with can later. Traditional ESL programs usually teach the various forms of BE and the present progressive tense in the beginning. Basals usually teach them later. Vocabulary items overlap by chance rather than design. How can the gap between the ESL curriculum and the reading curriculum in the elementary schools be bridged?

Bilingual education is one bridge. Bilingual education enables children to acquire reading skills in their native language while they are acquiring oral competencies in English. Yet, it is not feasible to have a bilingual program for each of the many languages that comes to our schools. Even when bilingual programs are feasible such as bilingual programs for Spanish speaking children in Southern California, not every child who would benefit from such a program is in a school which has such a program. How can the gap between the ESL curriculum and the reading curriculum be bridged for those students who are not reached by the bilingual programs?

Teachers' manuals in basal readers suggest that the classroom teacher wait to teach limited and non-English speaking children the reading in the basal program until some unspecified time in the future when they understand the English in the basal. While agreeing that children should not be instructed in written symbols whose referents they do not understand, the writer believes that withholding reading instruction from children who are neurologically ready to read may also be unwise. As the students get older it becomes more and more difficult to deliver a beginning reading program to them. The lower grade (1st to 3rd) elementary classroom teacher devotes a great deal of her time to teaching reading. It seems wise to take advantage of this opportunity for the sake of the students' academic survival.

*This is a revised version of a paper presented at the CATESOL State Conference in San Francisco in March. 1978.

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Roach Van Allen and others working in the field of reading have developed the Language Experience approach. The Language Experience approach matches the language of the child and the lesson by writing down the exact words of the student's spontaneous speech and then teaching him to read the written symbols for his own oral symbols. This approach enables the teacher to discover the student's lexicon and syntax and hence what part of the language he can be taught to read. It is probably the perfect match between the language of the child and the lesson which makes the Language Experience approach so successful with the language different child. It is an individualized and simple technique which can be implemented by either a classroom teacher or a trained aide. However, it requires a great deal more time and work on the teacher's or aide's part and hence it is difficult for already busy classroom teachers and aides to implement on a regular individual basis.

Some ESL programs for elementary school children, like those in adult programs, have a written component for teaching reading correlated with their oral language program. Although not fully developed reading programs, these materials could be taught by the ESL teacher or they could be taught by the regular classroom teacher after the ESL teacher has taught the oral forms. The first approach greatly reduces the amount of time the ESL teacher has to teach oral language thereby undercutting the unique function of an ESL program in an elementary school setting. The second approach has the same drawback as the Language Experience approach: it is difficult for already busy classroom teachers to develop and manage individual programs for the occassional ESL student or students in their classrooms.

It is suggested here that ESL curriculum writers bridge the gap between the ESL curriculum and the reading curriculum by developing oral language lessons to systematically teach the oral forms of the particular language in a particular reading program before the written form is presented by the classroom teacher. Such an approach re-orders what is taught in ESL classes to meet the specific needs of the specific reading program used in a specific classroom, school or school district. Such a practice is referred to here as Bridge English.

While the objective of the beginning reading program in elementary schools is to match written symbols with previously acquired oral symbols, the objective of Bridge English is to match the particular language symbols used in a given reading program with meaning. In contrast to the Language Experience approach which first discovers the language of the child in order to teach him to read, Bridge English first analyzes the language of the target reading program and develops oral language lessons to make this language meaningful to the child. The analysis proceeds at two levels: lexicon and syntax.

The following is an example of Bridge English developed for a segment of a specific reader, Macmillan's Series R.

Problem: Series R, Level 4, pp. 4-13.

I Can

I can jump. Can you jump, too?
I can ride. Can you ride, too?
I can run. Can you run, too?
I can read. Can you read, too?

Analysis

vocabulary from previous lessons:	jump, ride, run
new vocabulary:	read
new syntax:	can for ability in a declarative sentence with I
	can for ability in a question with you
	too

Suggested ESL Activities

1. Objective: read

Demonstrate read by reading the students' name tags. Then ask them to read the tags.

2. Objective: "Can" for ability in a declarative sentence with "I".

Demonstrate with two jars, one which has the top glued on and one which does not. Open the unglued jar and say "I can open this." Try to open a glued jar and say "I can't open this." Give the two jars to each student and let them repeat the process.

3. Objective: "too"

a. Demonstrate with several unglued jars. Open one jar and say "I can open this". Open another jar and say I can open this, too". Continue with all the unglued jars using too each time. Allow the students to do the same.

b. For enrichment, at another session repeat the activity in 2.a. using several glued jars, saying, "I can't open this...I can't open this either...I can't open this, either", etc.

4. Objective: "Can" in question word order with "you"

a. Demonstrate by having your puppet ask you "Can you open this?", replying "sure", and then opening it for him. Have one child sit at the other end of the room. Give another child an unglued jar and tell him "Ask so-and-so (at the other end of the room) to open

this." Guide the child to cross the room and say "Can you open this?" to the other child. Guide the seated child to say "sure". Repeat the process until every child has been sent across the room.

b. Repeat the activity in 3.a. using the glued jars and guiding the seated child to say "I'm sorry. I can't." after failing to open the jar.

Problem: Series R, Level 4, pp. 14-21

You Can, Too

You can't run.
You can run. But you can't jump.
You can run and jump. But you can't ride.
You can run and jump and ride. But you can't fish.
You can run and jump and ride.
And fish!

Analysis

new vocabulary: fish (verb)
new syntax: can for permission/can't for denial of permission
and connecting two parallel structures
but connecting one affirmative and one negative statement

Suggested ESL Activities

1. Objective: "Can"for permission/"can't" for denial of permission

a. Use a modified version of "Mother, May I?" Give one child a spinner with a board 1/4 red and 3/4 green. Have the other children line up at the other end of the room and guide them to ask one by one "Can I take a step?" Guide the child with the spinner to spin it and say "Yes, you can." if the spinner stops on green and "No, you can't." if it stops on red. Next round guide the children to ask "Can I take two steps?", etc. The first child to the other end of the room wins.

b. Vary the game with pictures of the previously learned verbs. Use masking tape to lay out a large grid on the floor. Put one verb card in each square of the grid. Guide each child to ask the child with the spinner if he can do the activity pictured in each square (Can I fish?, Can I jump. etc.). Each time he gets permission to do so have the child act out the action pictured and proceed to the next square.

2. Objective: "and", "but"

a. This drill anticipates the use of like in subsequent lessons. Introduce the names of several food items using pictures. Demonstrate and by saying as you point to the pictures "I like pudding and peas". Guide each student to tell you two things he likes.

b. Demonstrate but by saying as you point to the pictures "I like pudding and peas but I don't like corn." Guide each student to express his own likes and dislikes using the same syntax.

c. The previous lesson on too can be re-inforced by varying the sentence pattern at another session to "I like peas and I like potato chips, too."

Problem: Series R, Level 4, pp. 22-29.

Dogs

I like little dogs. Little dogs sit.
I like big dogs. Big dogs jump.
Little dogs jump, too.
Jump, little dogs, jump!
Down, little dogs, down!
Sit little dogs, sit!
Down, big dogs, down!
I like little dogs.

Analysis

new vocabulary: little dogs, big dogs, down, sit, like (verb)
new syntax adjectives
commands peculiar to dogs
habitual action (or characteristic action) of a group

Suggested ESL Activities

1. Objective "like" (verb)

This was taught in 2.a. in the previous lesson.

2. Objective Adjectives

Use the pictures in the text to illustrate "big dogs" and "little dogs".

3. Objective: Commands Peculiar to Dogs (down, sit, jump)

Using a dog puppet give the commands "jump", "down" and "sit". Manipulate the puppet to "obey". Give the children dog masks or ears or tails to symbolize their role-play as dogs. Ask the child-dogs to "sit", etc. Then let other children give the commands. Extend the command to "Jump, dogs, jump", "Down, dogs, down", etc.

4. Objective: Habitual Action Characteristic of a Species or Group

Teach the words fly, run, and hop by saying "I am flying", etc. while demonstrating the actions. Command the students to fly, run and hop. Let them command each other (or you).

Teach the nouns birds, rabbits and horses through pictures. (Note the three types of regular plurals, /z/ /s/ and /iz/, are introduced here.) Say "Birds fly", "Rabbits hop" "Horses run". Ask a puppet "What do rabbits do?", etc. Have the puppet answer, "Rabbits hop" etc. Ask the children the same questions and guide them to respond as the puppet did.

Problem; Series R, Level 4, pp. 30-35.

The Little Man and the Big Man

p. 32 The little man jumps.
He likes to jump.
He likes to jump.
So he jumps.

p. 33 The big man says,
"I can't jump.
But I can sit.
I like to sit.
So I sit."

p. 34 The little man runs.
He likes to run.
He likes to run.
So he runs.

p. 35 The big man says,
"I can't jump.
And I can't run.
But I can sit.
I like to sit.
So I sit."

Analysis

vocabulary from previous lessons: man
new vocabulary: says
new syntax: he likes (3rd person singular)
like to + verb
so (as a sentence connector)
use of the present tense to tell a story

Suggested ESL Activities

1. Objective: He says

Repeat the ESL activity where students ask "Can I take one step?" but guide the students to direct their questions to a "helper" student rather than to the student with the spinner. Guide the "helper" to go over to the student with the spinner and ask "Can so-and-so take one step?" Guide the student with the spinner to respond "Yes he(she) can" or "No, he (she) can't" according to what the spinner says. Then guide the "helper" to return to the student who asked the question and say "So-and-so says 'yes'" or "So-and-so says 'no'".

2. Objective: He likes

a. Extend the ESL activity where students describe their likes in foods. Demonstrate the new language by saying to a puppet "What does so-and-so like?" Have the puppet "ask" that student "What do you like?" After the student replies "I like such-and-such", have the puppet "report" back to you "He likes such-and-such." Then ask a student what another student likes. Guide him to ask the other student and report back to you as the puppet did. Guide the students to substitute "he" and "she" for the names of the students.

b. For enrichment, use the same technique to talk about dislikes in food, using the negative response "He(She) doesn't like such-and-such".

3. Objective: Like to + verb

Vary the ESL activity where students describe their likes in food by substituting pictures illustrating verbs. Include pictures of activities in the basal (fishing, jumping, running) as well as pictures of activities children like (skating, riding a bike, etc.) and dislike (washing dishes, making a bed, etc.) Proceed as in the activity where likes in foods is used.

4. Objective: "So" as a sentence connector

Demonstrate the words tired, sick, afraid with actions and pictures. Draw them on flash cards and drill them.

Lay pictures of home, bed and doctor in different sections of a masking tape grid on the floor as the one used in the "Can I?" game. Standing in front of the grid say "I'm going to my home" and go to the first picture. Say "I'm going to my bed" and go to the second picture. Say "I'm going to my doctor" and go there. Then say "I'm going to my seat" and sit down.

When all the vocabulary in the above two paragraphs has been mastered, pick up one of the adjective flash cards and go to the appropriate place, saying "I'm tired so I'm going to my bed" or "I'm afraid so I'm going to my home", etc. Let the students choose cards and repeat the process.

5. Objective: Use of the present tense to tell a story

Make a picture book, drawing one illustration per page. On one page sketch a boy jumping, on the next a boy running and on the next a boy sitting. Then sketch a girl jumping, running, and sitting. Choose an actor and an actress from the class. "Read" the pictures to the class ("The boy jumps. He runs. He sits. The girl jumps. She runs. She sits.") Have the actor and actress do the actions as you "read" the pictures. Let the students take turns "reading" the pictures and acting the parts.

Bridge English is not suggested as a substitute for an ESL curriculum; a well-designed ESL curriculum should offer much more language than any particular language embodied in any one reading program. Bridge English is suggested as an addition to the ESL program. It not only helps to close the gap between the ESL program and the reading program, it also enriches the ESL program.

On one hand Bridge English breaks with ESL tradition by reordering conventional curriculum sequencing. On the other hand, it is a natural extension of ESL traditions. The ESL profession has traditionally taught its students to read that portion of the language it has first taught orally. It doesn't wait until the students have native command of the oral language to introduce that part of the written language which the students know.

Bridge English lacks the simplicity of the Language Experience approach. It is more difficult to develop lessons for Bridge English than the Language Experience approach. It requires ESL specialists to develop it However, Bridge English can be used earlier in a child's language development than Language Experience and it may possibly take the child further, faster in his command of oral-written symbols. It also relieves, rather than adds to, the classroom teacher's work load thus increasing its chances of success. It furthermore helps to integrate the language different child in the mainstream curriculum.

Bridge English may not be feasible with all reading programs. It will not be feasible, for example, with programs which randomly introduce a wide variety of syntax. Nor will it be feasible with readers which follow a sequence which does not parallel the language development of children. If ESL instruction is required in an environment where the reading program used does not lend itself to Bridge English techniques, it is suggested that another program which can be used as a basis for Bridge English be selected.

In summary, there is a gap between the ESL curriculum and the reading curriculum in the elementary school. The classroom teacher may bridge the gap with a Language Experience approach. The ESL profession may also bridge the gap by systematically analyzing the language of a target basal reader and developing oral language lessons from it to be taught before the classroom teacher presents the written symbols for the language. Such an addition to the ESL curriculum may contribute to the academic survival of the ESL students.

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